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Cutting cost - the time has come

By Martha Woodward

As Lewis Cosby, Chuck Bowers, and Sandra Lea have warned us, Knox County Government is nearing bankruptcy, or may already be bankrupt. It is time for us to listen to those who know how to save money and to begin saving money in the areas where the county spends the most money and that is in the field of education. We can no longer afford to overspend on school buildings when we are being told there are ways in which we can save money.

Realizing we may only get one bite at the apple our elected officials need to be prudent with it. The consensus in East Tennessee seems to be that our greatest need is schools and jails. Several counties are under Federal mandate to bring their antiquated jails into the 21st century; concurrent with not having the finances to keep up with the demands population growth has placed on school facilities.

It is ironic that lack of education has been proven to lead to an increase in crime; so while the courts worry about the civility with which we treat convicted criminals our legislature must also address the critical need of improving our education facilities, otherwise the future needs of the former may completely drown out the ability to even try to educate our children.



Sandy Loy, a local businessman, has been a long time vocal supporter of improving K-12 education through legislative change in the way we build schools in Tennessee. The principles he preaches of cutting costs through new and simpler contract methodology could also be successfully applied to jails or any public facility. The way he explained it to me it seems pretty simple.

By using a construction manager to represent the entity building a new facility, that entity realizes savings by "Building for themselves." The principle is the same as when an individual saves money by building their own house, only on a larger scale. Many have learned the hard way that while acting as your own contractor on a home may save you money on one hand... the inherent hassles, delays, and cost over runs can more than negate the benefits.

This is where a professional construction manager comes in, because on large public projects the dollars warrant the cost of hiring a professional construction manager to make sure the public entity realizes the savings without the hassles and delays.

While Public Building Authorities were originally created with this philosophy in mind, their evolution into government bureaucracies has led to less than favorable results. Mr. Loy (a certified construction manager) is working with state legislators to hopefully bring this common sense philosophy into real practice for the benefit of us all. He has already worked to implement new legislation to protect school children from sex predators; so I suspect his passion, expertise and common sense about this will successfully help the State deal with the current critical need to improve our jails and schools!